

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
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R 291300Z NOV 76  
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9753  
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 7128

EXDIS

E O. 11652 GDS  
TAGS: PFOR JO SY XF  
SUBJECT: JORDAN-SYRIA TIES AND OTHER MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING RECENT VISIT WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD, ERNSTWHILE ROYAL ADVISOR ABDUL MUNEIM RIFAI OBSERVES THAT ASAD PLEASED WITH LEBANESE SITUATION AND PREPARED STAY IN LEBANON FOR YEARS IF STABILITY REQUIRES IT. RIFAI FEELS PLO REQUIRES LEADERSHIP CHANGE BUT DOUBTS PALESTINIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL CAN BRING IT ABOUT BECAUSE PNC DOMINATED BY FATAH. HE THINKS EAST BANK PALESTINIANS NOW MORE FAVORABLE TO WEST BANK STATE WHICH RIFAI BELIEVES WOULD BE IRREDENTIST. FOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE, RIFAI SEES CLOSE TIES WITH SYRIA AS BEST WAY TO KEEP JORDAN INVOLVED IN MIDEAST DIPLOMACY. EVENTUALLY, RIFAI ENVISAGES CONFEDERATION AND POSSIBLY EVEN A "GREATER SYRIA" AFTER KING HUSSEIN LEAVES POLITICAL SCENE. RIFAI SAID ASAD IS COUNTING ON U.S. PEACE INITIATIVE IN COMING YEAR AND COUNTS ON KING HUSSEIN AS A WINDOW TO U.S. AS PRIME JORDANIAN PROPONENT OF SYRIAN-JORDANIAN RAPPROCHEMENT, RIFAI'S ANALYSIS OVERLOOKS SOME OF ITS OBVIOUS DRAWBACKS, INCLUDING ADVERSE EXTERNAL REACTIONS AND THREATS TO  
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JORDANIAN INTERNAL STABILITY. END SUMMARY.

1. ABDUL MUNEIM RIFAI, EX-PRIME MINISTER AND POLITICALLY ACTIVE DOYEN OF RIFAI FAMILY, WHICH HAS KING HUSSEIN'S EAR ON FOREIGN POLICY, IN PRIVATE MEETING GAVE ME HIS VIEWS ON SEVERAL IMPORTANT MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS FOLLOWING HIS RECENT AND EXTENSIVE TALKS WITH ASAD IN DAMASCUS. HE FOUND ASAD PLEASED BY LEBANON DEVELOPMENTS--MOVING INTO PLO AND CHRISTIAN CONTROLLED AREA, PARTICULARLY SYRIAN ARMY'S SUCCESS IN WHAT RIFAI THINKS IS ISRAELIS ACCEPTANCE OF LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS, AND LEBANESE CHRISTIANS SATISFACTION WITH POLITICAL SITUATION WHICH THEY NOW FEEL THEY DOMINATE AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO WITH SARKIS' HELP. RIFAI THINKS LEBANESE CHRISTIANS' OPTIMISM HELPED BY ASAD'S CONTEMPT FOR JUMBLATT AND ARAFAT AND BY ASAD'S INTEREST IN PLACATING LARGE SYRIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHICH RIFAI CLAIMS NUMBERS AROUND TWO MILLION. ASAD SAID TO BE PREPARED TO STAY IN LEBANON FOR A LONG TIME--MAYBE SEVERAL YEARS, KEEPING FIRM HAND ON DEVELOPMENTS IF STABILITY THERE

REQUIRES IT.

2. RIFAI FEELS PALESTINIANS REQUIRE LEADERSHIP CHANGE, BUT HE DOUBTS A PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING CAN BRING IT ABOUT BECAUSE IT WOULD BE DOMINATED BY FATAH. EFFORTS BEING MADE TO REBUILD SAUQA IN SYRIA WITH ASAD'S ENCOURAGEMENT. RIFAI SAYS PALESTINIANS ON JORDAN'S EAST BANK HAVE BECOME MORE BOLDLY PRO-PALESTINIAN AND ANTI-JORDANIAN AS RESULT OF LEBANON EVENTS, AND NOTION OF WEST BANK-GAZA STATE NOW MORE ATTRACTIVE TO THEM. SUCH A STATE RIFAI THINKS, WOULD BE TRUNCATED BY WHAT ISRAELIS PREPARED TO GIVE UP AND THUS IT LIKELY TO HAVE STRONG IRRIDENTIST TENDENCIES WITH CONSEQUENT DANGERS TO JORDAN AND TO HASHEMITE RULE. THEREFORE, RIFAI BELIEVES, JOJ NEEDS TO CONTINUE TO PLAY STRONG ROLE IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS BECAUSE THEY AFFECT JORDAN'S (AND KING HUSSEIN'S) VITAL INTEREST. IN THAT SENSE, IT WAS MISTAKE FOR KING HUSSEIN TO AGREE TO  
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JORDAN'S OMISSION FROM RIYADH CONFERENCE. RIFAI SEES CLOSER TIES WITH SYRIA AS WAY TO HELP KEEP JORDAN INVOLVED IN MAJOR DECISION OF REGION, AND HE ARGUES FAILURE FURTHER TO CONSOLIDATE SYRIAN TIES WOULD MAKE SYRIA CONSULT LESS WITH JORDAN AND LEAVE KING HUSSEIN IN THE COLD.

3. IN EXPANDED DISCUSSION OF JORDAN-SYRIA RELATIONS

RIFAI FELT THE SOONER SOME FORM OF FEDERATION COMES  
THE BETTER FOR BOTH COUNTRIES. HE REGRETTED KING  
HUSSEIN'S CURRENT CROP OF FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS  
IN PALACE CONSELING HIM TO GO SLOW ON THIS MATTER,  
AND RIFAI FEARED THIS WILL GIVE WRONG SIGNALS TO  
ASAD WHO IS READY TO MOVE AHEAD. FOR ASAD, LEBANON  
DIVERSION IS OVER, HE WANTS COMPANY IN WORKING WITH  
SADAT ON FURTHER PEACE MOVES, HE NEEDS TO SHOW SYRIAN  
BAATHISTS SOME RESULTS REGARDING HIS RAPPROCHEMENT

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 AMMAN 7128

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WITH HASHEMITES, AND HE NEEDS JORDAN'S SUPPORT  
VIS-A-VIS IRAQ AND ISRAEL. RIFAI AGREED WITH GOJ'S  
CURRENT PROCLAIMED POLICY OF APPROACHING CLOSER  
SYRIA TIES WITH SMALL, TANGIBLE, STEP-BY-STEP  
BUILDING BLOCKS OF ASSOCIATION RATHER THAN STERILE  
POLITICAL RHETORIC, BUT HE WANTS ADDITIONAL MOVES SUCH  
AS APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE TO PROPOSE SPECIFIC COMMON  
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. HE FAVORS CONSIDERABLE SELF  
GOVERNMENT FOR COMPONENTS OF A JORDAN-SYRIAN FEDERA  
TION WITH ROTATING HEAD OF STATE, BUT AT MINIMUM WITH  
STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY OVER DEFENSE AND  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS(HIS VIEW DEFINATELY INCLUDES VETO  
RIGHT FOR BOTH JORDAN AND SYRIA ON THESE MATTERS)  
SUCH CLOSER TIES WOULD REQUIRE JORDAN TO DEVELOP ITS

OWN POLITICAL PARTY WITH WHOM SYRIAN BAATHISTS COULD TALK, AND MORE REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS WOULD HAVE TO BE CREATED IN AMMAN. JUSTIFYING THESE MOVES, RIFAI THOUGHT THAT AFTER KING HUSSEIN LEAVES THE POLITICAL SCENE JORDANIANS' CHOICE MIGHT BE BETWEEN BEING A PART OF A "GREATER PALESTINE" OR A "GREATER SYRIA" AND RIFAI PREFERS LATTER.

4. RIFAI REPEATED HIS FAMILY'S FAMILIAR CRITICISM

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ABOUT BADRAN'S CURRENT GOVERNMENT'S INEFFECTIVENESS AND UNIMAGINATIVENESS, AND SAID BADRAN NOT INFORMED BY KING HUSSEIN ON FOREIGN POLICY. HE ALSO CRITICIZED KING HUSSEIN FOR RECENT TENDENCY TO SPEND TOO MUCH TIME RELAXING AND NOT ENOUGH ON IMPORTANT PROBLEMS OF STATE.

5. RIFAI FOUND SYRIANS AND ESPECIALLY ASAD TO HAVE DEVELOPED BETTER APPRECIATION OF KEY ROLE OF U.S. IN MIDDLE EAST. ASAD, HOWEVER, SAID TO DEPEND HEAVILY ON KING HUSSEIN FOR WINDOW ON U.S. , AND BELIEVES SUCH A ROLE FOR JORDAN SHOULD CONTINUE IN MONTHS AHEAD. RIFAI FOUND SYRIA-SOVIET TIES NOT CLOSE AND CHILLIER FOLLOWING SOVIET BEHAVIOR OVER LEBANON.

6. AS FOR NEXT STEPS, ASAD DID NOT FORESEE EVENTS AS APPROACHING WAR-PEACE ULTIMATUM, NOR DOES HE WANT THAT TO HAPPEN. ASAD SAID TO BE CURENTLY CONTENT TO LET SADAT INITIATE PROPOSALS AS IN PAST, AND ASAD IS COUNTING ON U.S. PEACE INITIATIVES IN THE COMING YEAR.

7. COMMENT: ABDUL MUNEIM RIFAI'S OPINIONS ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE HE AND HIS NEPHEW (EX-PRIME MINISTER ZAID RIFAI) HAVE THE EAR OF THE KING ON FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS, BECAUSE THEY ASSERTIVELY PROMOTE THEIR VIEWS IN JORDAN'S GOVERNING INNER CIRCLE, AND BECAUSE ZAID RIFAI IS EXPECTED BY MANY TO RETURN TO PRIME MINISTERSHIP IN NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE. AT THE SAME TIME, BOTH RIFAIS HAVE AXES TO GRIND(ESPECIALLY RE BADRAN GOVERNMENT) AND A CERTAIN PRIDE OF AUTHORSHIP AND OWNERSHIP OF FOREIGN POLICY IDEAS THAT THEY HANG ONTO AND PROMOTE IN WHAT IS SOMETIMES IMBALANCED FASHION. WE NOTE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT BOTH ABDUL MUNEIM AND ZAID RIFAI'S DISCUSSION OF CLOSER GOJ-SYRIA TIES IN NAME OF JORDAN'S INTERESTS INCLUDES ONLY PERFUNCTORY RECOGNITION OF DAMAGE TO THOSE INTERESTS THAT TOO FIRM POLITICAL LINKS WITH SYRIA WOULD GENERATE IN SAUDI ARABIA, U.S., ISRAEL AND EGYPT. MOREOVER, BOTH RIFAIS (AND ALSO KING

HUSSEIN) PROBABLY INFLATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH JORDAN  
HAS USED RELATIONSHIP TO INFLUENCE ASAD; INDEED  
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KING LAST YEAR COMPLAINED FROM TIME TO TIME OF  
FAILURE OF ASAD TO CONSULT ON SOME FOREIGN POLICY  
MOVES. CERTAINLY KING IS ALSO NOT ENAMORED AT PRESENT  
OF TURNING OVER TO FEDERATION DEFENSE AND FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS, EVEN IF HE WERE TO RETAIN A THEORETICAL VETO.  
ALSO, WHILE HE TALKS ABOUT POLITICAL PARTIES, HE SEEMS  
LESS POSITIVE THAN THE ELDER RIFAI. WHAT RIFAI HAS  
TO SAY ABOUT LOCAL PALESTINIAN VIEWS OF EVENTS AND  
SETTLEMENT PROSPECTS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE HE IS  
IMPORTANT JORDANIA LINK WITH THAT COMMUNITY, BUT IT  
APPEARS SOMEWHAT EXAGGERATED (AND CERTAINLY NEWS TO  
US) TO SAY PALESTINIANS IN JORDAN HAVE BECOME GENERALLY  
ANTI-JORDANIAN BECAUSE OF LEBANON DEVELOPMENTS. ON  
THE CONTRARY, OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT A GREAT MANY OF  
THEM SEE THEIR FUTURE AS STAYING ON EAST BANK AS  
"JORDANIANS" WHOSE GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE CLOSE TIES  
WITH A MODERATE, PALESTINIAN-CONTROLLED WEST BANK.  
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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** PERSONAL OPINION, INTERVENTION, PALESTINIANS, WEST BANK, FEDERATION, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, PEACE PLANS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 29 NOV 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** CunninFX  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1976AMMAN07128  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D760441-0954  
**From:** AMMAN  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1976/newtext/t1976115/aaaaaekl.tel  
**Line Count:** 249  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION SS  
**Original Classification:** SECRET  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 5  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** SECRET  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** CunninFX  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 10 JUN 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <10 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <04 OCT 2004 by CunninFX>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** JORDAN-SYRIA TIES AND OTHER MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS SUMMARY: FOLLOWING RECENT VISIT WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD, ERNSTWHILE ROYAL ADVISOR ABDUL MUNE IM RIFAI  
**TAGS:** PFOR, JO, SY, XF, LE, PLO, (RIFAI, ABDUL MUNEIM)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006